

Characteristics of High Quality Grant Applications

2001 Dropout Prevention Demonstration Program Grant Competition

The purpose of this summary analysis is to provide potential applicants with a snapshot of the characteristics of strong applications based on a sample of applications submitted under the Dropout Prevention Demonstration Program (DPDP). The DPDP received a total of 94 applications in response to the request for proposals (RFP) in May 2001. The RFP required applicants to thoroughly describe how their projects would effectively address dropout prevention for students most at risk of dropping out of school. Applicants were required to address selection criteria in 5 categories -- Need for the Project, Significance of the Project, Quality of Project Design, Adequacy of Resources and Quality of Project Evaluation.

The following analysis describes the strengths found within applications representing four rank order categories: (1) applications of the 13 funded grantees; (2) the next 5 applications that ranked high among reviewers, which would have been funded if additional funds were available; (3) the middle 5 applications in rank order; and (4) the 5 applications ranked at the bottom of the scale.

- Conformity of the presentation to the outline format: The outline format that is defined in the RFP should match the format of the proposal. Each of the five components (Need for the Project, Significance of the Project, Quality of the Project Design, Adequacy of Resources and Quality of Project evaluations) should be identified and elaborated on. Applicants who strictly follow the outline

Applicants to the School Dropout Prevention Program will be evaluated on the following:

Overall Assessment

- Conformity to outline format
- Quality of Abstract

Selection Criteria

- Need for Project
- Quality of Design
- Quality of Project Services
- Quality of Management Plan
- Quality of Project Personnel
- Adequacy of Resources
- Quality of Project Evaluation

form create symmetry between the application under review and the instrument used to score the application. The reviewer is more favorably disposed to read subsequent sections of the application for quality of content with an open mind because his or her job has been made easier by the manner in which the information has been presented.

- Quality of the Abstract: Successful applications included a tight, one page abstract at the beginning of the presentation that was specific and clearly

communicated. In these applications were obvious linkages between the abstract and the five selection criteria categories, including summary statements that provided guideposts for the reviewer and reserving elaborations for subsequent sections. Applicants should bear in mind that the application review process tends to be "front-loaded," meaning a significant score would have already been achieved before the reviewer reached Quality of Project Design, the third section of the application.

Strengths of the Selection Criteria Content

■ **Need for the Project:** Applicants who were favorably reviewed provided well-documented statistics for state and local annual dropout rates and related issues (i.e., truancy, student attendance, academic performance, etc.). Successful applicants also provided documentation to highlight the severity of the dropout problem in their district/state. In addition, the funded proposals clearly identified and described the gaps in service that would be addressed by the program.

■ **Significance of the Project:** Successful applications provided concrete examples to describe how the project planned to implement effective strategies for dropout prevention. Funded proposals also identified steps or procedures for making the public aware of the program activities and identified the activities and/or components of the project that will be developed for replication.

■ **Quality of Design:** Successful applicants clearly presented the goals and outcomes and included a description of a feasible way to measure them. In addition, they provided specific information on the program's plan to coordinate with collaborative partners, including a description of those agencies and documentation that they will contribute to the dropout prevention efforts of the project. These applicants also provided specific examples of how state and local agencies will be involved in the effort, as well as charts, graphs, research statistics, school district performance records, etc., to describe the benefits to the target population of such a project.

■ **Adequacy of Resources:** Favorably reviewed applicants identified specific programs that have access to State, local, and Federal funds with which to coordinate funds and also letters of support from collaborative partners describing a plan to coordinate resources for the project. These applicants besides used statistical or descriptive data to justify that project costs are reasonable.

■ **Quality of Project Evaluation:** Successful applicants gave information on staff roles, supportive research data, and specific examples to describe how the evaluation is compatible with the project design. They also provided a matrix, flow chart, or other type of graphic to illustrate how performance measures are aligned with the outcomes. Favorably viewed applicants incorporated either the use of research-supported methodology and techniques to define evaluation measures, or they included a line item to hire a consultant to analyze qualitatively and quantitatively the outcome of the project. A plan was included to disseminate findings and results to inform the public of effective dropout prevention strategies.